DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 137 862 CS 501 670

AUTHOR Conville, Richard L.
TITLE Change, Process and the Future of Communication Theory.
PUB DATE Mar 77
NOTE 22p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southern Speech Communication Association (Knoxville, Tennessee, April 1977)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Behavior Development; *Communication (Thought Transfer); Communication Skills; *Individual Development; *Information Theory; Interaction; *Learning Processes; Self Actualization

ABSTRACT

Currently, two trends are converging that will shape the future of communication theory. One is "the new narcissism"--a phenomenon characterized by prescriptions for personal fulfillment such as those reflected in popular psychologies and religions. The second trend is the scientific revolution concerned with exchanging static models of reality for process models of interaction. Using some basic tools of structuralism and communication theory, this discussion presents a prototype of a process-oriented theory of the acquisition and development of new communication behaviors. This theory revolves around three principles: the principle of obliqueness, which suggests that no single person or occurrence can teach communication; the principle of exchange, which asserts that for every personal security that is gained some alienation results; and the principle of dying, in which the security of familiar levels of understanding is replaced by new ideas or a "new identity." (KS)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED137862

CHANGE, PROCESS AND THE FUTURE OF COMMUNICATION THEORY

Richard L. Conville

Department of Speech and Theatre

The University of Tennessee

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Richard L. Conville

TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER.

March, 1977

CS 501 670

CHANGE, PROCESS, AND THE FUTURE OF COMMUNICATION THEORY

Two trends are converging that will shape the future of communication theory. One is "The New Narcissism," so called by Peter Marin (9), that great and growing medicine show that peddles the elixir of total fulfillment, the tonic of personal perfection, that all purpose prescription for getting-yours-no-matter-what. The other is the scientific revolution that exchanges static models of reality for process models, that swaps mechanistic models for organismic models, that focuses on becoming rather than being.

The former is a cultural movement endemic to our time. One may take Marin's attitude toward the new narcissism, the cult of self improvement, and view it as an informal conspiracy to dupe unsuspecting and weak citizens. But there is a more serious view, that of Robert Jay Lifton. He sees essentially the same complex of social movements as genuine efforts of cope.

> Everywhere, men and women band together to confront the pervasive sense of "living deadness" emanating from holocaust, undigested change, large techno-bureaucracy, and, above all, the image of the machine. They seek new forms of connection, movement, and integrity around which to build new communities for living and working (8, p. 138).

Thus in a time "of severe historical dislocation, these institutions and symbols--whether having to do with worship, work, learning, punishment, or pleasure--lose their power and psychological legitimacy" (8, p. 135). The complex of movements Marin calls the new narcissism

Lifton sees as "The quest for images and symbols in new combination, for what might be called communal resymbolization" (8, p. 135).

In any case, there is more. This complex of movements is a generally well financed and attractively marketed school of communication. It should and increasingly will attract the attention of speech communication scholars, and we will learn much from it.

Go to your college bookstore or to any paperback bookshop and there you will see the magical potions displayed: TM, EST, Psychocybernetics, Assertiveness Training, TA, TA for Tots, TA for Teens, PET, TET, LET, Dale Carnegie, Norman Vincent Peale, Arica, Hare Krishna, I'm OK, You're OK, Sun Myung Moon, Krishnamurti, Primal Scream, Gestalt, Marriage Enrichment, I Ain't Much Baby, But I'm All I've Got, Notes to Myself, Rogers, Maslow, ad infinitum. And each one, in its own way, teaches a way of relating to, a style of communicating with, other people. It would be a grave error for the profession to ignore this development in the culture at large.

And I don't think we will ignore it. It is a response to conditions that seem to be with us to stay. These conditions are not infrequently referred to in the literature of our field. For example, Bochner and Kelly cite five factors that "set the stage for much of the emotional upheaval and anxiety characteristic of our society" (2, p. 284).

> These are: (1) the decline of religion during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries;[15] (2) the traditional Western emphasis upon human rationality;[16] (3) the apparent failure of scientific technology to solve human problems as well as the failure of people to recognize the fallacy of such an expectation;[17] (4) the rapid development of a highly technological and impersonal mass-production society;[18] and (5) the nature of traditional American values (2, pp. ~~283~~-284).

Professionals in the field of speech communication will be forced to seriously consider the new narcissism. It is quickly becoming the accepted response to the anomie and malaise of our time. And it is a response that is changing the fabric of communication in our culture.

The latter trend is a world view that provides a methodology uniquely equipped to study the techniques and assumptions of a movement whose very core is change. Only a philosophical position that affirms process as the central reality can provide an adequate understanding of a movement whose central goal is changing human beings. Nearly five years ago David H. Smith reminded the profession that times have changed, that the consensus of the scientific community is that Newton, J. B. Watson and Gerry Miller were all three wrong, that there is a better way to look at things than through Newtonian mechanics, Watsonian SRs, and Millerian prediction-and-manipulation (13). Smith quoted Whitehead:

> The how an actual entity becomes constitutes what that actual entity is; so that the two descriptions of an actual entity are not independent. Its 'being' is constituted by its 'becoming.' This is the principle of process (13, p. 175).

And he quoted Berlo's application of Whitehead to communication theorizing.

> A communication theorist rejects the possibility that nature consists of events or ingredients that are separable from all other events. He argues that you cannot talk about the beginning or the end of communication or say that a particular idea came from one specific source, that communication occurs in only one way and so on (13, p. 175).

But this is an unrealized ideal. Though most of us have talked process, most of our research has remained as mechanistic as ever. With but a few exceptions most published research has failed to use the methodological and analytical alternatives that Smith suggested as consistent with a process perspective.

For example, in the essay referred to above by Bochner and Kelly (2), they presented a view of communicative competence and a set of instructural strategies for teaching interpersonal communication competence. They quite adequately accounted for the new narcissism in terms of a quest for competence. But ironically they returned to a mechanistic, input-output model for their system of instructional strategies. And I do not expect them or anyone else to have done otherwise at the time. No process theory for communication learning then existed. Even now we have no theory for the acquisition and development of new communication behaviors that is consistent with a process view of reality.

What I would like to do in this paper is to outline such a theory. That will involve elaborating a current model of communication with some of my own research on the structure of personal change.

Herbert Richardson's essay "Three Myths of Transcendence," although it is ostensibly concerned with types of religious experiences and their associated feelings, presents three ways to conceptualize personal change, three ways to think about how people transcend present and move into the future (11). First there is the myth of separation and return. Paradigmatic are the stories of Hansel and Gretel, Cinderella, and Peter Pan. In religion, the parable of the prodigal son comes to mind, and Richardson refers to "pietà statuary [in which] the mother from whose womb the Savior was born receives him back again (into her lap "womb")" (11, p. 107). The upshot of it all is that here is a view of personal change that says I find my true identity, happiness, and nurture by returning to the place from whence I set out. That place,

if I may elaborate on Richardson a bit, may be a physical place, home, for example. "Tie a yellow ribbon on the old oak tree." It may be a psychological place and take the form of a nagging nostalgia or a yearning to return to that good ole time religion or to the political philosophy of the founding fathers.

Richardson asserts that Western people's world views are informed not by a separation and return myth but by the myth of conflict and vindication. Hence the infatuation of American television with law enforcement, from the westerns of the 50s and 60s to the cops and robbers of today, from the Lone Ranger to Police Woman. And the "archetypal Western stories are the bondage and exodus of Israel, the testing and triumph of David, the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, the martyrdom and glorification of the saints" (11, p. 109). From this point of view I find my true identity, happiness and nurture as I grapple with the enemy, struggle against staggering odds, or strive for ever higher goals--and win. "How the West was Won" is more than a movie title. It circumscribes a culture-wide view of change, personal and corporate. It is a style that in general undergirds the conduct of foreign affairs, the operation of business, and the proliferation of Sport.

> The movement of conflict-and-vindication life is no longer the cyclical death and rebirth, hunger and feeding, being lost and being found. It is, rather, a linear history of events aimed at a future goal, activated by a personal decision, social interaction, and faithful endurance (11, p. 109).

But there is a third myth of change, the myth of integrity and transformation. Although this myth is largely a hope of Richardson's

("What is needed today, therefore, is a new transcendence and identity myth as the foundation of the psychosocial order" (11, p. 111).), he does cite one example that incorporates fundamental alternatives to the prior two myths. That is Arthur Clarke's 2001: A Space Odyssey (3). His comparison with the odyssey of Ulysses is instructive.

> The journeying of Ulysses takes him . . . home. But the odyssey of the space man takes him . . . nowhere. The end of his seeking is neither a place nor (given the infinity of space itself) is it a "conquest." That is, the end of the space man is not some "goal" in terms of which he either "cyclically" or "linearly" defines himself. It is, rather, his own self-transcendence into a higher being, his spiritual rebirth, his divinization (11, p. 111).

You may recall that, near the end of the story, when Bowman's space pod landed, it set down in what looked like a plush American hotel suite. It looked as though he had returned to where he'd started from: until he flipped through the Washington, D. C. phone book only to find blank pages; until he noticed the books on the shelves were only book spines; until he opened a number of otherwise familiar looking packages in the refrigerator. He had "returned," but only in quotation marks.

At this point there is, to me, an obvious omission from Richardson's essay. With the prior two myths of transcendence or identity he had associated a visual, geometrical image. The myth of separation-and-return he had dubbed cyclical and had strongly implied that a circle was an apt metaphor. The myth of conflict-and-vindication was associated with a straight line, dubbed linear. But no such geometrical representation was suggested for the myth of integrity-and-transformation. I want to suggest one and in so doing elaborate on a familiar communicatfon

model. I want to suggest the helix and pick up an ignored (so far as I know) aspect of Dance's helical model (4) of communication and develop it a bit further.[1]

There are several characteristics of a helix that represent what I think Richardson means by a myth of integrity-and-transformation. First, with a circle, I may start at point A and go around to Point A again. With a helix however, I may start at point A and when I go round 360° I am at point A' above or below point A. You can't go home again, or at least, the $home_2$ I return to is not the same as the $home_1$ I left. Korzybski, Lee, Hayakawa, Haney. And Eliot:

> We shall not cease from exploration
> And the end of all our exploring
> Will be to arrive where we started
> And know the place for the first time (5, p. 59).

The second characteristic of a helix that seems to be consistent with the myth of integrity-and-transformation is that the helix may itself twist, turn and curve about as the developing integrity of the person would dictate. It need not itself be linear.

Dance's helix seems to be linear, to be headed towards the top of the page. This is the major point of difference between Dance's helix and my helix-attributed-to-Richardson. Otherwise, both convey the notion of process, both attest to the influence of the past on the present and the present on the future, and both affirm that change or process is as fundamental to psychic life as DNA is fundamental to genetic life.

That portion of Dance's essay I want to elaborate begins with his assertion, "A helix can also be used to represent learning"(4, p.296). In my opinion that is the germ of a theory of the acquisition and

development of new communication behaviors. However, Dance's application is to curriculum development and to the ontogeny and phylogeny of speech communication. In contrast, I want to apply the helix to learning by focusing on the individual and his or her personal helix and by focusing on development in a very short term sense. This I have done before,[2] and I would like to present those results here and then show how they serve to elaborate Dance's helix and how Dance's helix helps me to understand my results. The progeny of this consummation is in my opinion the beginnings of a process oriented theory of the acquisition and development of new communication behaviors.

The personal-helix-in-the-short-term that I have dealt with before is the experience of Helen Keller at the well (6). Her experience of learning the linguistic relationships between letters and words and between words and things is in my opinion the archetype of experiences that result in a person's growth and development as a communicator.

The problem is how to conceptualize this experience that seems to be at the heart of the acquisition and development of new communication behaviors? My answer is to do a structural analysis of the experience. I take my cue from Paul Ricoeur who argues that, if human behavior is enough like literary texts (and he argues congently that it is), then the same interpretive procedures can be used for human behavior as are used to understand texts (14). The specific interpretive procedure he has in mind is structural analysis.

The best way to describe what I mean by a structural analysis is to present an example. Below is Levi-Strauss' study of the Oedipus

myth (7/Ø). The tabular display results from the same process of searching for "sames and differents" used by a structural linguist in search of the phonemes of a language. What Levi-Strauss has done is to partition the Oedipus story into its major episodes. Then he has placed similar episodes, or episodes that are functional equivalents, in the same columns. The rows-and-columns arrangement, if read top to bottom and left to right preserves the sequence of episodes while at the same time presenting a typology of episodes in the columns.

Cadmos seeks his sister Europa, ravished by Zeus			
		Cadmos kills the dragon	
	The Spartoi kill one another		
			Labdoacos (Laios' father) = lame (?)
	Oedipus kills his father, Laios		Laios (Oedipus' father) = left-sided (?)
		Oedipus kills the Sphinx	
			Oedipus = swollen-foot (?)
Oedipus marries his mother, Jocasta			
	Eteocles kills his brother, Polynices		
Antigone buries her brother, Polynices, despite prohibition			

Figure 1.

Levi-Strauss' structural analysis of the Oedipus myth (7, p. 214).

Levi-Strauss has performed two operations, dissection (arrangement in rows) and articulation (arrangement in columns) (1, pp. 151-152). By analogy it is as if each column were a phoneme and each event in the column were an allophone. He explains the general significance of the columns:

> Were we to tell the myth, we would disregard the columns and read the rows from left to right and from top to bottom. But if we want to understand the myth, then we will have to disregard one-half of the diachronic dimension (top to bottom) and read from left to right, column to column each one being considered as a unit (7, p. 214).

Ricoeur refers to the telling of the myth as explicating its surface semantics whereas the understanding of the myth (i.e., understanding the "meanings" of the columns) yields a depth semantics (12, p. 557). This latter is the goal of structural analysis, according to Roland Barthes, "to reconstruct an 'object' in such a way as to manifest thereby the rules of functioning . . . of this object (1, p. 149). What one has then as a result of structural analysis, "is therefore actually a simulacrum of the object, but a directed, interested simulacrum, since the imitated object makes something appear which remained invisible, or if one prefers, unintelligible in the natural object (1, p. 149).

Let us turn now to Helen Keller's experience at the well. I handed out mimeographed copies to my interpersonal communication class in the spring, 1976. I asked them simply to read it, then on the back list in order what Helen experienced. I then led a class discussion on the experience and started the discussion by asking what she experienced first. When there was consensus I moved on to what she experienced

next, and so on. The following is the class consensus regarding the order of Helen's experiences. I had not previously analyzed it myself.

1. alone, lost
2. anticipation, expectation
3. warmth, security
4. frustration, misunderstanding
5. revelation
6. joy, wonder
7. validation, affirmation

Figure 2.

Class consensus on the order of Helen's experiences.

Whether you agree (try it yourself!) is not so important at this point. Rather what is important is that it can be done at all. Helen's insight having experience can be analyzed as to its order of sequence. A surface semantics can be developed. But further, a depth semantics can be developed. In Levi-Strauss fashion, here is what I came up with:

1. alone
2. anticipation
3. warmth
4. frustration
5. revelation
6. joy
7. validation

Figure 3.

Structural analysis of Helen Keller's experience.

My intention was to arrange the columns as clusters of similarities or functional equivalents. In the same way a linguistic field worker might find that, in final position, [p^{unreleased}] and [p^{aspirated}] are taken to be "the same" by English speakers, I found, playing the role of my own informant, that [alone] and [frustration] were functional equivalents. I would label the first column /Alienation/, column two /Security/, and column three /Insight/.

Assuming the Helen Keller experience to be paradigmatic, what does this structural analysis tell us about experiences that result in the acquisition and development of new communication behaviors? What depth semantics of the experience does it yield? Three things I believe. First, the reconstruction of personal reality may be facilitated by the presence of <u>both</u> Alienation and Security in a person's experiencing. <u>All</u> of either experience will not yield reconstruction; rather, the tension between the two precipitates change.

Both Alienation and Security exist in nearly pure forms in many educational institutions. A not uncommon teaching style is one in which the "distance" between teacher and student is great, teacher remarks are intended to prod students into learning by insulting them or otherwise putting them down, and the teacher takes pride in being hardnosed. On the other hand it is not unusual to find a suffocating, syrupy, "humanistic" style in which the teacher knocks him- or herself out to be the student's buddy, in which negative feedback is prohibited, and in which the teacher takes pride in being sensitive. The above analysis suggests that a steady diet of either Alienation or Security will not facilitate students' experiencing insight.

Second, there may be a pendulum effect in a person's preparation for insight. Look back at Figure 3. If columns 1 and 2 are labeled (-) and (+) respectively, then taking the stages preceding "revelation" in sequence we have: -, +, +, -. Preparation for insight may be of a certain sort. It may include an alternation between Alienation and Security before insight occurs. Like climbing a steep grade, the path seems at times to lead away from the peak, at times straight on.

The third thing this structural analysis may indicate about the insight having experience also concerns preparation. A student must somehow be "ready" to learn, ready to have personal and theoretical insights into his or her own communication and that of others. This analysis suggests that a part of that readiness is a certain level of alienation. No matter what is our intervention role, teaching or consulting, or being a parent or counselor or whatever, our clients, the recipients of our intervention efforts, must sense a need for what we can do. We must to some extent be answering the questions they are asking out of their need or alienation.

Now return to the helix and let's use the Helen Keller results to doctor it a bit. Arbitrarily find a point on the helix and label it Alienation, then drop a line from that point to the "beginning" of the helix, and extend the line upward also. One hundred eighty degrees from the Alienation point, mark a Security point and repeat the plotting of the line. If you start with Dance's model you'll get something like the following figure.

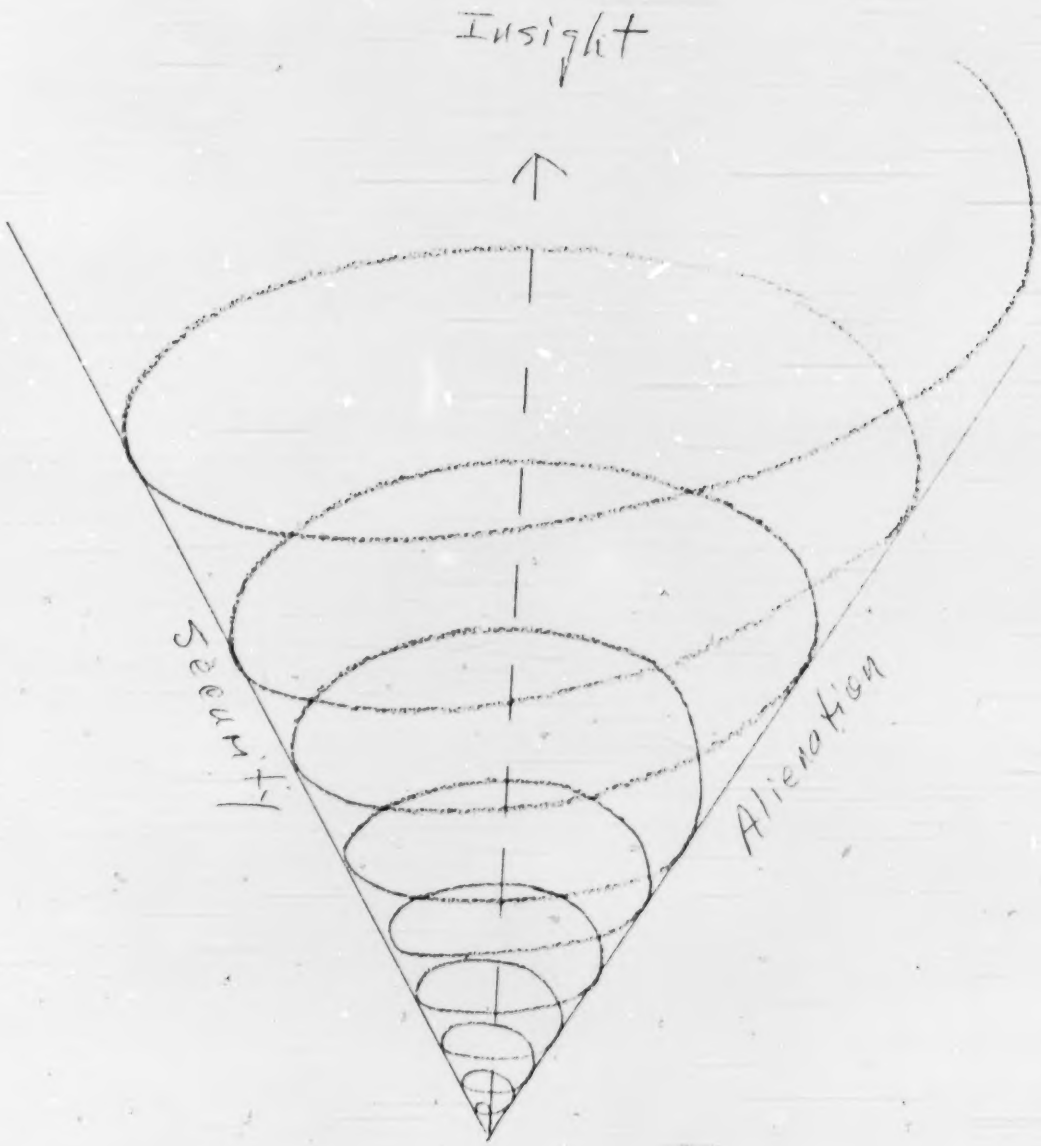

Figure 3.

Structural-Helical Model of Communication Development

There are several inferences one may draw from the resulting figure, inferences that go beyond the structural analysis alone or the helical model alone. Together these inferences suggest the outlines of a process theory of the acquisition and development of new communication

behaviors. The development of such a theory is indicative of the future of communication theory: Process oriented and focused on the question of how people change communicatively.

First there is the Obliqueness Principle. Take the upward movement of the helix to represent one's growth in understanding of communication and one's implementing that understanding in the form of new behaviors. Then one moves in that direction only indirectly. The helix coils about its own center but is not that center. That center, the moving point about which the radius of the helix swings, marks out the direction of movement. That center may move only inches toward growth and development while I may travel miles about that center and (ironically) nearly orthogonal to the direction of movement.

Michael Novak has made the same point quite differently.

> You can lead a man to liberty; he himself must drink. Thus discernment [or insight] is taught by a sort of indirection. It is approached by way of negatives. "The truth is not x, not y, not z; look over here, then; not a, not b, not c; once more now, not m, not n, not o." The bright and willing man begins to catch on; the dull or the unwilling never see. Discernment makes the difference.[37] But in order to sensitize persons to that critical point, it is necessary to seduce their attention away from rules and regulations, laws and structures, general principles and directives. They must be led to discern that the critical point is discernment (10, p. 73).

So the Obliqueness Principle suggests that, whether as a result of incidental life experiences or as a result of formal educational experiences, no one or no thing can teach me how to communicate--directly. All events and people can do is affect my helical movement. Therefore, if I want to know why I have changed communicatively, or if as a researcher, I want to know why people-in-general change communicatively,

the last place I should focus my attention is on those communication understandings and skills per se.

The second principle I see in the structural-helical model of communication development is the Exchange Principle. I pay for what I get. The legal tender is alienation. For every new security gained, I pay what the market will bear in alienation, estrangement, loneliness. For every new movement toward insight a price is exacted. I get what I pay for. For every 360 degrees I travel on my helix, from security to security, I pass GO--Alienation--and instead of collecting $200, I am the one who pays.

This affects my expectations. Not only can I no longer expect someone to teach me how to communicate, no longer can I expect it to be easy. Experience, whether incidental or formal-educational, that leaves me unscathed, unruffled, safe and secure has not moved me about my helix.

In the economy of communication development, I must give, even give up something, in order to get. That brings me to the third principle of communication development that I see in the structural-helical model. That is the Principle of Dying. As I swing about the helix, not only do I pay for new securities and insights with repeated alienations, I pay by leaving where I am for a place I am not. In order to move to a new level of understanding I must leave the security and familiarity of my present level of understanding. My old identity dies as a new identity is born. It is well said by Robert Jay Lifton:

> Ultimately, genuine transformation requires that we "experience" our annihilation in order to prevent it, . . . every significant step in human existence involves some inner sense of death (8, p. 149).

So the cycle of Alienation and Security can also be viewed as a cycle of death and birth.

What will the future of communication theory be like? It will be more process oriented than it is today. Static models of reality will give way to process models. Partly because of this and partly because it is an infatuation of our culture, communication theory will more and more concern itself with the question of change, e.g., how people change communicatively. Using some basic tools of structuralism and a 10 year old communication model, I have presented a primitive prototype of a process oriented theory of the acquisition and development of new communication behaviors. The theory revolves about three principles: the Obliqueness Principle, the Principle of Exchange; and the Principle of Dying. My hope is that this essay will generate a dialogue that will lengthen the radius of that revolution.

REFERENCES

1. Barthes, Roland. "The Structuralist Activity." In Richard and Fernande De George (Eds.) The Structuralists from Marx to Levi-Strauss. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1972.
2. Bochner, Arthur P. and Clifford W. Kelly. "Interpersonal Competence: Rationale, Philosophy, and Implementation of a Conceptual Framework." The Speech Teacher 23, 1974, pp. 279-301.
3. Clarke, Arthur C. 2001: A Space Odyssey. New York: The New American Library, 1968.
4. Dance, Frank E. X. "Toward a Theory of Human Communication." In Frank E. X. Dance (Ed.) Human Communication Theory. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967.
5. Eliot, T. S. Four Quartets. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1971.
6. Keller, Helen. The Story of My Life. New York: Doubleday, 1947.
7. Levi-Strauss, Claude. Structural Anthropology. New York: Basic Books, 1963.
8. Lifton, Robert Jay. The Life of the Self. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976.
9. Marin, Peter. "The New Narcissism." Harper's 251, 1975, pp. 45-50+.
10. Novak, Michael. The Experience of Nothingness. New York: Harper and Row, 1970.
11. Richardson, Herbert W. "Three Myths of Transcendence." in Herbert W. Richardson and Donald R. Cutler (Eds.) Transcendence. Boston: Beacon Press, 1969.

12. Ricoeur, Paul. "The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text." Social Research 38, 1974, pp. 529-562.

13. Smith, David H. "Communication Research and the Idea of Process." Speech Monographs 39, 1972, pp. 174-182.

FOOTNOTES

[1]For a similar view of communication development see Hampden-Turner, C. M. "An Existential 'Learning Theory' and the Integration of T-Group Research." In Robert T. Golembiewski and Arthur Blumberg (Eds.) Sensitivity Training and the Laboratory Approach. Second edition. Itasca, Illinois: F. E. Peacock Publishers, 1973.

[2]Parts of the remainder of this essay are taken verbatim from Conville, Richard L. "Acquisition and Development of New Communication Behaviors: A Structural Analysis." Unpublished paper, The University of Tennessee, December, 1976.